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Re-Thinking Staff Resources in the E-Serials Environment. A Report of the ALCTS Continuing Resources Section, Education Committee Program, American Library Association Annual Conference, Chicago, July 2009

Abstract

As more serials have become electronic, serials work has become more complex, and staff workloads have increased to deal with both print and electronic continuing resources. Staff resources are limited, so some work must stop or change in this environment. In this program, three speakers, two from academic libraries and one from a public library, discussed the methods they have used to streamline workflows and re-allocate staff to manage continuing resources more efficiently. The speakers were asked to cover what they stopped doing and why, what staff re-training was needed, the impact of the changes on customer service, and what they have learned from their experiences.

Disciplines

Library and Information Science

Comments

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**RE-THINKING STAFF RESOURCES IN THE E-SERIALS ENVIRONMENT.
REPORT OF THE PROGRAM AT THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL CONFERENCE, CHICAGO, IL, JULY 2009.**

As more serials have become electronic, serials work has become more complex, and staff workloads have increased to deal with both print and electronic continuing resources. Staff resources are limited, so some work must stop or change in this environment. In this program, three speakers, two from academic libraries and one from a public library, discussed the methods they have used to streamline workflows and re-allocate staff to manage continuing resources more efficiently. The speakers were asked to cover what they stopped doing and why, what staff re-training was needed, the impact of the changes on customer service, and what they have learned from their experiences.

The first speaker, Rick Anderson, Associate Director for Scholarly Resources and Collections at the University of Utah, has become well-known for championing the elimination of serials check-in, but he has instituted a wide range of other efficiencies since coming to the University of Utah. His presentation title summarized his approach: "To Print: Drop Dead." He has tried to reduce time spent on purchasing and processing print materials by cutting the firm order budget in half and buying e-books on demand using a patron-driven acquisitions process. Decisions about what to cut were based on usage data, research patterns, and local curriculum and research needs. For instance, at Utah, print circulation was down 53% since 1997. OCLC does the physical processing and cataloging of 90% of the University of Utah's purchases.

For continuing resources, Rick Anderson has stopped journal check-in, journal binding, claiming, and MARC cataloging by local staff. He believes that journal check-in is unnecessary because people only need to know what is on the shelf, journal binding is a waste of money because the paper issues won't be used much, and claiming may generate duplicate issues. MARC cataloging by local staff is not cost-effective, averaging \$30 per title.

Local catalogers can process rare and unique collections more effectively than OCLC, so they are being retrained to catalog these materials using Dublin Core, which is more streamlined than MARC. In retraining, willingness has been a bigger problem than ability. Catalogers needed to be convinced that their professional judgment and abilities were still as important in the CONTENTdm environment as in the MARC environment.

The impact on customers of these changes is anticipated to be less wasted money, faster response to requests, greater speed to stacks, and more flexibility (especially with print on demand). In the course of these changes, Rick Anderson has learned that it is important to communicate continuously. Sometimes staff worry when they are told about new ideas that have not been fully developed, and his response to that is, "If you taste cake batter, don't be upset if it doesn't taste like cake yet." Documentation is important because sometimes people misunderstand what they hear. If a decision creates problems for patrons, it is the wrong decision. Patron morale matters more than staff morale. In addition, be aware that consensus will never lead to change. A leader should do a leader's work.

The second speaker represented a public library perspective. Gloria Guzi is the Acquisitions Librarian—Serials, at the Cleveland Public Library. They have a large collection, over two million unique titles, and serve a diverse population. Print serials are still very important to their patrons, and they collect popular magazines in 28 languages. The main library has 5,231 print subscriptions (4,169 unique titles) and the branches have 4,567 (521 unique titles). In addition, they have 29,391 online e-journals that are unique titles, many of these through CLEVNET. They were among the first public libraries to subscribe to JSTOR.

The major thing that the Cleveland Public Library discontinued with print serials was to stop updating MARC holdings. This decision was made after their migration from DRA to SIRSI in 2003 revealed considerable problems with the summary statements migrated as MARC holdings. The clean-up would have been a full-time job. Instead, patrons are referred to the local, non-formatted union listing information online, which is more accurate and has a more straightforward display.

Other efficiencies that the Cleveland Public Library achieved with serials were due to reallocation of tasks. One of these reallocations was to move claiming of branch serials to the branches, which prevented delays in claiming. The branch subscriptions were moved to Wolper Subscription Services, a vendor with an efficient web-based claiming system. The Serials Section in the main library is now only involved with renewals and non-start subscriptions in the branches, which greatly reduced their daily workload.

The other major reallocation of tasks occurred in the position responsibilities of Gloria Guzi, the Acquisitions—Serials Librarian. Starting in 1996, original cataloging of serials was reallocated to the Catalog Department, and copy cataloging, union listing, and serials control supervision were assigned to an acquisitions assistant. The Acquisitions—Serials Librarian was also chair of a Serials and Electronic Resources Committee that discussed resource approval and eliminations, but she had no authority to assign tasks, and had to do all the background research work because subject department librarians were not expected to be adept in selecting electronic resources. This changed after 2005, when the committee was split in two between serials/continuations and electronic resources and involved more staff, different people became chair of each with appropriate authority, and subject department liaisons became responsible for doing background research and completing database request forms. The Acquisitions—Serials Librarian is still responsible for price and license negotiations; informing vendors of terms, conditions, and database parameters; and working with the web applications specialist to make additions to the Serials Solutions A-Z list of databases.

From these experiences, Gloria Guzi and her colleagues learned to go beyond old paradigms to implement changes that were ultimately best for the patron. This required a sense of detachment from sacred cows. It helped to include as broad a group as necessary to handle electronic serials, provide opportunities for ongoing training, and to rely on and trust the staff. They have found that e-serials do not have to be treated as though they are special any more.

Carol Ann Borchert, Coordinator for Serials at the University of South Florida, was the third speaker. In contrast to Rick Anderson's ideas, her library experimented with eliminating serials check-in and binding, but reinstated them after seeing the results. In 2003-2004, as they were shifting from NOTIS to Aleph, the University of South Florida developed a Technical Services Plan for Optimization and Productivity, examining all workflows, job descriptions, functions, and statistics in the technical services area. The Coordinator of Electronic Collections had no staff and too much work, and there was no serials librarian for ten years while print serials moved to electronic. There was no cohesive workflow for electronic journals, concerns about the integrity of SFX data, and some method was needed to keep track of ERMS-type data.

The 2004 review resulted in the creation of the Coordinator for Serials position, for which Carol Ann Borchert was hired. Processing slips were developed for e-journals and other e-resources, and an in-house ERM was created using Microsoft Access. To improve e-journal handling, an online ticket system was created to track and report them, e-journal records were set up to link to SFX from the catalog instead of to vendor sites, and SFX was set up to display subscription targets first before aggregator and free targets.

The University of South Florida experimented with changes to print workflows to try to save time. In 2005/2006, they discontinued check-in of print journals, but reinstated it in summer 2006, except for newspapers. They found they spent as much time problem-solving with less quality information than they had spent on checking-in. They needed the call number because they continued to bind complete volumes. They have tried selective binding and are going to

move towards it again in fall 2009. Some of the binding problems have been due to having separate bound and unbound locations, but they hope to dismantle Current Periodicals and only pull issues when they need to be bound.

The University of South Florida also made organizational changes to manage print and electronic serials more effectively. Serials Acquisitions formerly had seven people and now has four positions, with 2.5 dedicated to print. The Coordinator for Electronic Collections gained some staff: the Coordinator for Serials, two librarians assigned part-time to e-resources, and one FTE staff member. There has been difficulty training new serials staff to register titles, and higher level tasks are being handled by librarians.

Carol Ann Borchert has found automation to be one of the most efficient ways to improve the e-journal workflow. E-journal packages have been moved to be direct, using a macro to load multi-line invoices. EDI invoicing is used for vendor-paid titles. Publisher-provided information is loaded into SFX, and MARCIt! is used for e-journal cataloging. University of South Florida is no longer cataloging free web sites, since these would not be covered by these automated methods.

The University of South Florida is moving from print to online as fast as they can, and have only 2000 titles left in print. They have saved money while improving the integrity of SFX data for patrons and activating and cataloging e-journals faster. The titles in the SFX A-Z list are also listed in the catalog, so patrons don't have to check both places. The bottom line is that they are able to handle a larger workload with fewer people.

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